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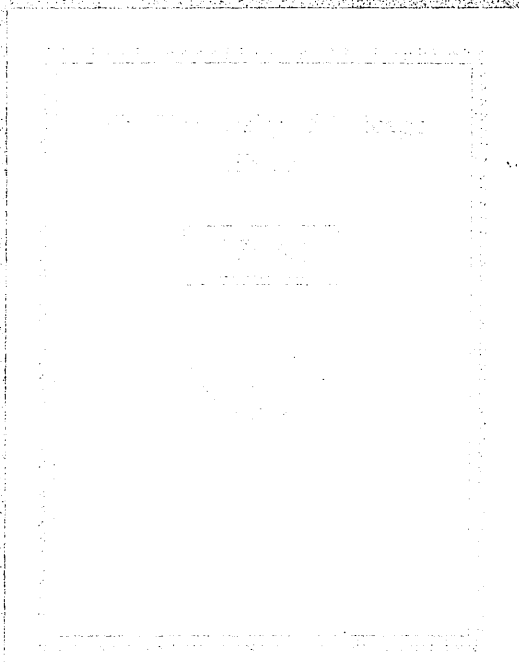
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*and their influence  
in the modern world*

by

**Ernest A. Payne**

*Senior Tutor, Regent's  
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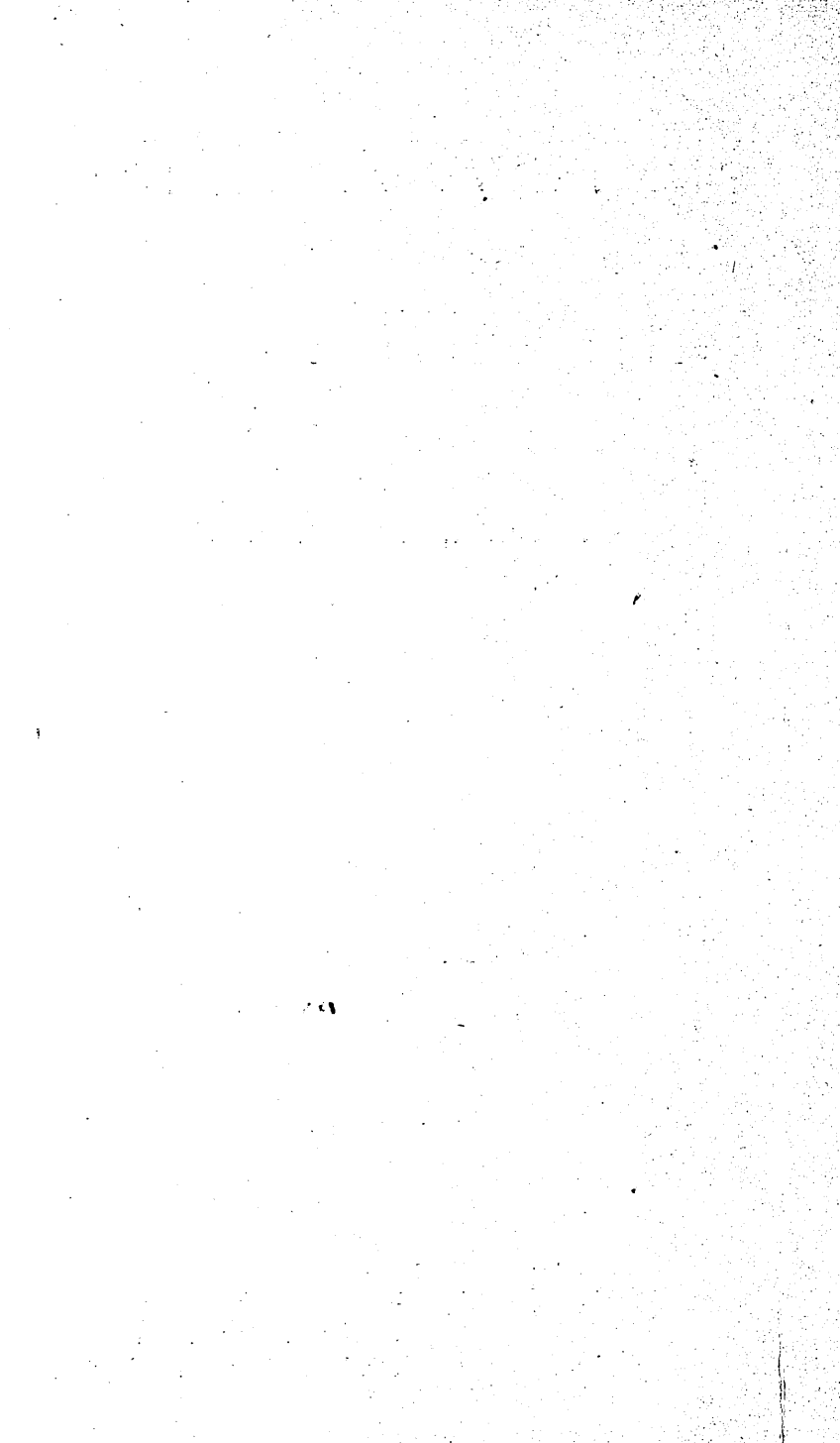
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### PREFATORY NOTE

The lecture which follows was delivered as the Dr. Williams's Trust Lecture at the Presbyterian College, Carmarthen, on October 5th, 1948.

I am grateful to the Trustees and the College authorities for their kindness on an occasion which is a pleasant memory, at least to the lecturer. The notes printed at the end will, I hope, prove of service in indicating some of the new material available for a study of the left wing of the Continental Reformation.

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## THE ANABAPTISTS OF THE 16th CENTURY AND THEIR INFLUENCE IN THE MODERN WORLD.

### I

THE left wing of the Continental Reformation remained long neglected by those studying that mighty spiritual movement, and its significance is still widely misunderstood. There has been too little realisation of how much the modern world owes to the radicals of the sixteenth century and of how fruitful their ideas have been in shaping the religious and social patterns of the modern world, in particular those of Britain and the United States. Inevitably attention has been fixed upon Luther and Calvin. The living legacy of these two outstanding personalities is clearly to be seen in the fields of contemporary theology and churchmanship. We are all their debtors. But those who, in the sixteenth century desired more radical solutions of ecclesiastical issues have often been the subject of sharp criticism and abuse. They have been regarded as revolutionaries, heretics and fanatics, deluded, even perverted. The left-wing movement, at one time widespread and powerful, was almost entirely stamped out on the Continent owing to the hostility of both the Roman Catholics and the major Protestant groups. But the blood of thousands of martyrs watered the seeds of many new and fruitful ideas. Not a few of these ideas found expression in the sects of seventeenth century England and continue influential in the great Free Church communions. Others were cherished by scattered groups on the Continent and, after a long almost underground existence, were carried across the Atlantic to the security and freedom of the New World. Yet others passed slowly but surely into the general heritage of Western Christendom and Western civilisation and are today accepted far beyond the borders of any particular Church.

A number of considerations make it timely to re-examine the left wing of the Reformation. Five may be here briefly mentioned:—

(1) There is today a welcome renewal of interest in Free Church origins and it is certain that a satisfactory study of these carries one back to the continental radicals of the sixteenth century. As H. N. Brailsford has recently said: "The English

Puritan Left can be understood only when we realise that it drew much of its inspiration directly from the Swiss, German and Dutch Anabaptists."<sup>1</sup> If we are rightly to understand the *ethos*, polity and worship of the Free Churches, we must study not only Puritanism, and not only Puritanism plus Calvinism and Lutheranism, but also Anabaptism, Socinianism and sixteenth century *Spiritualism*. Of the left-wing groups it was the Anabaptists who were numerically the strongest and the most important. Indeed, the name is often used—and not without historical warrant—to include all the radicals.

(2) Theologians and ecclesiastical statesmen of all traditions are busily engaged today with the doctrine of the Church and the Sacraments. What is the Church? How should it be defined? What are its visible marks? How can baptism—which thinkers as diverse as Karl Barth and the Bishop of Oxford agree in describing as at present in a state of abuse—be rightly understood and practised? What is the right relation of the Church to the State, of the Christian to the magistracy and the sword? These are pressing contemporary issues and few are bold enough to assert that their present theory or practice in regard to them is entirely satisfactory. But these are the issues which occupied the Anabaptists and which they urged persistently on the Reformers. Moreover, often impatient of discussion and braving the formidable dangers they ran in an intolerant age, the Anabaptists put into practice the tenets to which they were led by their study of the New Testament. Few would now wish to follow them in all that they said and did. There are tragic and ugly pages in Anabaptist history. But on the main issues, it is no exaggeration to say that the minds of many in very different branches of the Church are now much more sympathetic than in the past towards the answers given by the Anabaptists.

(3) There is widespread concern in the Western world about human liberty, freedom of speech and toleration. In so many lands these are threatened or denied. We have come to regard them as characteristic of our way of life and fundamental to any worthwhile existence. The world seems to be divided, with increasing tension, into two ideological and political camps, the one based on liberty, the other on tyranny. There is, unfortunately, much that appears to confirm such a diagnosis of the present situation. But before we too easily, or finally, part the sheep from the goats, or acquiesce in the more dismal prophecies as to the future, it may be well to recall how relatively recent even in our own tradition is the idea of tolerance, how costly was its establishment

and where its roots really lie. Middleton Murry has recently argued that the bases of what he calls the "free society"—that is, Western Christendom at its best—are to be found in the humanism of the Renaissance and the experiential and undogmatic Christianity of the Independents of seventeenth century England.<sup>2</sup> There is much truth in this, but it remains incomplete unless one goes on to say that it was the Anabaptists who were one of the chief links between the Humanists and the Independents. It was from within the left-wing of the Reformation movement of the sixteenth century that there was first put forward the then new and revolutionary principle of religious toleration. Force, said the Anabaptists, ought not to be used in matters of religion and conscience. Neither Church nor State should compel men into uniformity of belief and practice, or torture them in the supposed interests of their eternal salvation. It was the pleas and claims made by the Anabaptists, and the staunchness with which they endured persecution from both Catholics and Protestants, which prepared the way at last for a wider and wiser charity.

(4) This leads on to a fourth consideration which gives added importance to a re-examination at this time of the Anabaptist movement. The claim for freedom to follow the dictates of conscience in matters of belief, worship and ecclesiastical order was joined with an eager Christian charity which, particularly in Moravia, found expression in a community life often described as communism. Settlements of several hundred persons lived together under an elected superintendent, or *haushalter*, usually himself a minister of the Word, with the principle of common ownership carried into all the details of living. When left undisturbed, these settlements, or brotherhoods, were markedly successful in agriculture and craftsmanship. Karl Kautsky, Friedrich Engels and other continental followers of Karl Marx regarded these Anabaptist communities with the deepest interest and sympathy, though they failed to recognise and understand the religious sanctions and motives which held them together. The Socialists of the Weimar Republic erected a statue to Thomas Münzer, the radical leader who perished at the time of the Peasants' Revolt. Luther once described Münzer as "the Satan of Allstedt". The great modern Lutheran historian, Karl Holl, however, admits that Münzer deserves the closest attention as a theologian and a religious man, and that he should be studied "more seriously than all the others of his kind."<sup>3</sup> We may well believe that Karl



Holl came to a far truer understanding of Münzer's significance than did the Weimar Socialists. Münzer's emphasis on the living Spirit of God, on the Inner Word and on identification with "the bitter Christ" was of more enduring significance than his part in the battle of Frankenhausen. But is it not of the greatest importance at the present time to study personalities and movements which link the disparate ways of life and thought of modern Europe? Is there not also much to be learned from the Anabaptist movement as to the real source and motive for both tolerance and community?

(5) The last of the considerations which makes timely a fresh study of the movement is this. A large body of new material is now available, thanks to the patient research of a handful of scholars during the past hundred years. This material is all too little known outside the Continent and certain restricted circles in America. But it makes necessary the drastic re-writing of most of the English encyclopedia articles and textbook paragraphs devoted to the Anabaptists and kindred groups. Most of these are based on the heated denunciations and polemics of opponents. They caricature rather than describe. They concentrate attention on the tragic episode of the "Kingdom of Münster", and on the eccentricities of a few unbalanced individuals, and fail to interpret the movement as a whole, or to present the main emphases, convictions and purposes which found expression in it. The best accounts in English are still those of T. M. Lindsay and Rufus Jones. But Lindsay devotes only 40 of the 1,100 pages of his *History of the Reformation* to the Anabaptists and of these nearly half are concerned with the Münster episode. Moreover, he wrote under the influence of Albrecht Ritschl and Ludwig Keller, who believed in the close connection between the Anabaptists and the heretical mystical sects of pre-Reformation times. For Lindsay the Anabaptists were essentially medieval in temper and outlook. Historians of the standing of Karl Holl and Walther Köhler now admit that this is an inadequate description. Anabaptism is an original growth of the Reformation epoch, with the direct, independent study of the New Testament as its central impulse. The great American Quaker scholar, Rufus Jones, devoted two stimulating chapters to the Anabaptists in his *Studies in Mystical Religion*, recognising their importance in the spiritual succession in which George Fox stands. In his later book, *Spiritual Reformers of the 16th and 17th Centuries*, Dr. Jones was concerned to isolate, or filter off as it were, from the left-wing movement as a whole, men like

Hans Denck, Bänderlin and Entfelder, Franck and Schwenckfeld. These he described as Spiritualists or Spiritual Reformers. But such discrimination, if pressed too far, becomes definitely misleading. Denck, for example, is a key figure in the early development of Anabaptism in central and southern Germany. In any case, however, Lindsay's work was published in 1907; the second of Rufus Jones's books in 1914. Since then a large amount of new material has become available. Much of it is in the form of official documents dealing with prosecutions. A few original works of Anabaptist piety and apologetic have been rediscovered. The riches of Anabaptist hymnology and martyrology have been brought to light. Valuable monographs and biographical studies have appeared. Most important of all, with the help of scholars from Germany, the Netherlands and the United States, the *Mennonite Lexicon*, now complete as far as the letter "O", has begun to gather up the results of the researches in this field.<sup>4</sup>

## II

The subject, then, is important and sufficient materials now exist for a more adequate study of it. "It is a grievous lack," wrote Karl Holl in 1922, "that we still possess no really exhaustive and comprehensive picture of the Anabaptist movement."<sup>5</sup> We still await the historian able to present it in its full range, complexity and variety. Is it possible in a few paragraphs to outline the story, indicating the central aspirations and convictions which found expression in it, and making clear how these lived on after the movement on the Continent had been almost entirely stamped out?

Clearly it was of far wider extent and larger numbers than is often realised. Almost simultaneously in Wittenberg and Zürich within a few years, or even months, of the initial protests of Luther and Zwingli against Roman abuses, radical groups made their appearance. Eager and able young men flocked to the banners of the Reformers, asking searching questions, pressing for an ever more drastic re-ordering of the life of the Church. The Greek New Testament had only recently become the possession of the more learned of them. Luther's German Bible was still in the making. But if appeal was to be made to the New Testament and to primitive Christianity, let it be made with courage and consistency. Neither Luther, Melancthon, nor Zwingli found it easy to answer the points put to them by their more uncompromising followers about images in churches, about

the elaborations of the Mass, about baptism, and about the true nature of the Church. Between 1520 and 1522 Luther certainly seems to have contemplated the re-ordering of the Church as a fellowship of believers. He hedged on infant baptism, but his appeal was frankly to Scripture, and, since he was at that time moving steadily forward on his path as a reformer, there was the real possibility of his returning here, as in other matters, to the earliest Christian practice. As late as May, 1523, Zwingli was moving in the same direction. But the prospects of Luther and Zwingli completing the work they had so notably begun, soon faded. The movement for radical reform was checked. Frightened by the revolt of the peasants, angered by Münster's sympathy with the exploited and his claim to the illumination of the Spirit, Luther threw in his lot with the princes. He became suspicious of enthusiasm. He spoke slightly of "spiritualism". He came to associate these things with social revolution and the overthrow of the true hierarchy in society and in the Church. The results have been lamentable for the subsequent history of central Europe. Luther stopped short of a full reformation. He was content to walk hand in hand with the State. He remained—to use the expressive words of Brunner—"bogged down halfway between Catholicism and the New Testament Church organisation".<sup>6</sup> Before long theological orthodoxy according to the Lutheran Confessions became more important than a vital Christian life. A new Protestant scholasticism was born, which did not hesitate to exact the severest penalties from all dissenters. Like a refrain there runs through the basic confessional document of Lutheranism, the *Augustana*, the phrase "damnant Anabaptistas".

At the same time, and for many of the same reasons, Zwingli decided that the nature and pace of the changes he would support should be determined by the city magistrates. They, not Scripture, were to be the effective court of appeal. When early in 1525 the little group of Swiss Brethren, led by Conrad Grebel, Felix Mantz and George Blaurock, felt that they could no longer turn their backs on what the New Testament told them about the true nature of the Church and of baptism, the power of the city council was invoked against them. Grebel died in prison, Mantz suffered public drowning, Blaurock was driven from Zürich. The ecclesiastical and the civil authorities (hardly separable either in theory or practice) united to order men and women to have their children baptized under the threat of severe punishment and even death.

A few months before the first baptizings of believers in Switzerland, Balthasar Hübmaier, of Waldshut, the friend and associate of Grebel, Mantz, and Blaurock, wrote a brief tract entitled *Concerning Heretics and Those who Burn Them*. He was being sought after by the Roman authorities and knew that his life was in danger. But the shadow of religious persecution was already raising its head even in the lands which had thrown off the yoke of Rome. Hübmaier's pamphlet seems to be the earliest plea that has come down to us for complete toleration. "A Turk or a heretic", he declared, "is not convinced by our act either with the sword or with fire, but only with patience and prayer. . . A law to burn heretics is an invention of the devil. 'Truth is immortal'." <sup>7</sup>

Four years later, in March 1528, Hübmaier was himself burned to death in Vienna and his wife, with a great stone tied round her neck, was thrown into the waters of the Danube. But his pleas for the rights of conscience, and his hatred of cruelty, found echoes in the writings of Castellio, Schwenckfeld, Franck and others. The same demand can be heard in the pages of Coornhert, in our own Helwys, Busher and Murton, in Roger Williams, in John Milton. Even in the seventeenth century, even in England and the American colonies, even among the Puritans, there was often contempt for those described as "toleratorists". <sup>8</sup> The last Englishmen to be burned for their religious beliefs suffered the supreme penalty in 1612, one in London, the other in Lichfield. Both were classed by their contemporaries as Anabaptists. Not until 1689 was the right of dissent from the beliefs and practices of the State Church legally recognised. The Toleration Act aimed at giving "some ease to scrupulous consciences in the exercise of religion". Even then, and until our own day, certain civil disabilities attached to religious dissent. The struggle for full spiritual freedom and toleration is not yet won in all lands nominally Christian. There is a significant sentence in one of the reports adopted by the first Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Amsterdam. It runs as follows: "We utterly oppose totalitarianism, wherever found, in which a State arrogates to itself the right of determining men's thoughts and actions instead of recognising the right of each individual to do God's will according to his conscience. In the same way we oppose *any church* which seeks to use the power of the State to enforce religious conformity". <sup>9</sup> We need to bear these things in mind, lest we speak too glibly about human liberty as one of the foundation principles of Christendom.

The progress made towards toleration in the hundred years following the appearance of Hübmaier's pamphlet received its main impetus from the Anabaptist movement. That movement passed through three stages—first, a brief period of rapid growth and the wide dissemination of Anabaptist ideas, then several decades of the most severe persecution and suppression, and, thirdly, a period of more peaceful re-emergence. The radical movement in and around Wittenberg resulted in no permanently organised community. Carlstadt and Schwenckfeld left Saxony in disappointment and disgust and became wanderers for the rest of their lives, sowing everywhere they went the seeds of an individual spiritual religion. On the other hand, the exiles from Zürich and St. Gall became the missionaries of a widespread popular movement. The leaders were duly appointed ministers and evangelists—the latter an office consciously modelled on the New Testament. But lay-evangelism also played a large part in the spread of the movement. To many this then seemed one of its most objectionable and dangerous features. It is not without significance that many of those who attended the first Assembly of the World Council of Churches found the report on the use and training of lay men and women one of the most novel and challenging documents. Three hundred years ago Anabaptists were pioneers in the field of lay witness, though to them it was obviously but the recovery of New Testament Christianity.

Refugees and evangelists passed down the Rhine valley and into the Low Countries. They crossed the Alps into Northern Italy and the Tyrol. They went down the Danube valley into Moravia and on to Poland. It was not long before there were Anabaptists in Scandinavia and in Britain. Religious interest and feeling ran high, and almost everywhere the preachers met with a response. As early as 1530 Sebastian Franck could write: "There already are in our time three distinct faiths, which have a large following, the Lutheran, Zwinglian and Anabaptist".<sup>10</sup> Little fellowships of believers were formed around the Word of God. Almost everywhere a distinguishing mark of the radical movement was refusal to take infants to the Catholic priests or the Protestant ministers for baptism. Not quite everywhere, but sufficiently often to give the movement its nickname, baptism on profession of personal faith in Christ became the way into the local fellowships. These fellowships practised a strict spiritual discipline over their members. The result was not pure atomism, though this is often one of the

charges made against the Anabaptists and against the conception of the gathered Church. The idea of a wider Christian association than the merely local was present in the minds of the leaders from the beginning. In spite of the difficulties and dangers, there were general gatherings of representatives at Augsburg, Schleithem and elsewhere. Many of the early Anabaptists, it should be emphasized, passed directly from obedience to Rome into simple Scriptural fellowships. As they tried to model their Christian life on the New Testament, they were not unaware that one of the marks of the Church is its unity. They knew that this unity must be shown not only by the members of each local brotherhood, but also between Christians in different places. They knew also that believers are part of a great succession, linked together in a fellowship which includes the Church triumphant.

### III

These points deserve emphasis and illustration. Those of other ecclesiastical traditions so often fail to perceive that "catholicity" may be treasured and preserved in more than one way. Early Anabaptist church organisation antedated and influenced that of the Calvinists. To the Anabaptists, it has been said, is due "not only the machinery of a single congregation, which was presently taken over by Calvin in his *Institutio*, and put into practice at Geneva, but also the machinery for an alliance of congregations, adopted in France during 1559, and in Scotland next year, and so well known as the Presbyterian scheme. But the 'brethren' had one feature which was dropped by the French, the Scots and the Dutch—an order of evangelists whose business it was to travel and propagate the faith". Among many of the Anabaptist communities of the sixteenth century the office, and even the title, *episcopos*, was to be found. What was emphatically rejected was, on the one hand, the priestly pretensions and, on the other hand, the worldly pretensions of the bishops of the Roman succession. There are today in the United States groups tracing their descent directly back to the continental Anabaptists who maintain an episcopal order of ministry.

The reality of the other aspect of "catholicity" may be illustrated from Peter Ridemann's *Rechenschaft unserer Religion, Lehr und Glaubens* and from one of the earliest Anabaptist hymnbooks. Ridemann was the chief pastor in Moravia from

1542 to 1556. His book, written while he was in prison in Marburg, was probably first published in 1545. It is a simple manual of faith and practice and was widely circulated and treasured among the Hutterian Brethren. There is nothing fanatical, revolutionary, or heretical about its simple piety. It begins with an exposition of the clauses of the Apostles' Creed and then deals with the right attitude to Scripture, baptism and the Lord's Supper, passing on to questions of Church order and discipline and the practical problems of Christian discipleship. At the end there comes a moving prayer for faithfulness in the face of affliction. The sense of being part of "the Church under the Cross" pervades the book. The same note sounds out again and again in the *Ausbund*, a hymnbook whose first known edition is dated 1564, but which is said to have had its nucleus in a collection of hymns put together by a group of sixty "Swiss Brethren", who were arrested in 1537 and imprisoned at Passau. This book is still in use among the Old Order Amish Mennonites of the United States.<sup>12</sup> In it are to be found hymns ascribed to early Anabaptist leaders like Blaurock, Mantz and Sattler, and metrical versions of the last confessions of a number of other Anabaptist martyrs. There are fine verse renderings of several Psalms, most of them those dealing with the sufferings of the righteous. The book opens with four specially interesting pieces. The first calls for heartfelt praises from the faithful in the manner and spirit of David and the Apostle Paul. The second, often spoken of as the "Bekenntnislied" and ascribed to Ridemann, is a metrical version of the Christian faith in Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It is in the last of the three stanzas that the lines occur :

Wir glauben ein' heilige G'mein,  
Ein' Apostol'sche Kirchen,  
Die durch den Heil'gen Geist allein  
Besteht, und lässt ihn wirken.

The third hymn is a long poem of thirty-five stanzas giving an account of the persecutions suffered by prophets, apostles and martyrs of the past. In the margin there stand references to the Bible and to Eusebius. Next comes a hymn which is a metrical version of the seventh chapter of the second book of Maccabees, where there is told the terrible story of the persecution of a Jewish mother and her seven sons. A hymnbook of this kind, it may be urged, shows an unhealthy preoccupation, or even obsession, with the theme of martyrdom. The fault for this lies not with the victims but with the persecutors. The point here

to be made is that these men and women were conscious of being one with the Apostolic Church and of suffering for the Apostolic Faith.

But the Anabaptists were given little opportunity of building up a complete pattern of church life and order. The Diet of Speier in 1529 decreed immediate death for any who did not present their children for baptism. The Emperor, the Roman hierarchy and most of the Protestant leaders agreed together in this drastic policy. The main motives behind it were probably fear of social unrest and desire to preserve the authority of the clergy, rather than any clearly thought out theology or ecclesiology. But official theory was committed to a belief in original sin, from the penalties of which baptism provided the only way of escape. The Anabaptists held a different view both of sin and of baptism. The Edict of Speier was ruthlessly enforced. Over large parts of Europe the Anabaptist movement was driven underground. Only in Moravia a few enlightened local princes gave protection to refugees whom they discovered to be industrious, pacific, charitable people with a simple genuine piety. In Central Germany, in the Tyrol, and in the Netherlands, the number of those burned and executed probably reached tens of thousands. The original Swiss Brethren, whilst earnestly praying for the magistracy, did not feel able themselves to enter upon it and enjoined non-resistance, even in the face of the Turks. The question of the *ius gladii*, the right and office of the sword, was one on which not all Anabaptists were agreed. Not unnaturally, as persecution bred fanaticism, apocalyptic hopes of deliverance found expression in certain places. Should the righteous patiently wait for the Day of the Lord, or should they take steps to inaugurate it?

The Kingdom of Münster was the work of a handful of desperate and deluded men who had escaped the horrors of mass executions in the Low Countries. The researches of C. A. Cornelius, Ludwig Keller and H. Detmer, have set the incident in truer proportions in relation to Anabaptism as a whole. Professor A. J. Toynbee quotes with approval the verdict of Carew Hunt; "The Münster revolt was really a caricature of the movement, which was essentially pacific".<sup>13</sup> But Münster brought fresh disasters on Anabaptists everywhere and made the name one to be feared and hated for many generations. Amid so much abuse, it was possible for the majority of Christians to forget or ignore the challenge presented by the Anabaptists in regard to, first, the nature of the Church and of baptism, secondly,



the demands of practical brotherliness and charity, and, thirdly, the principle of toleration.

#### IV

In strange and impressive fashion, however, the witness of the Anabaptists found a new and continuing life. There are in the world today a number of communities which trace their ancestry directly back to the sixteenth century Anabaptists, consciously preserving their traditions.

(1) *The Mennonites*. In the twenty-five years after the fall of Münster, Menno Simons gathered and built up from the ruins of the once strong Anabaptism of the Low Countries and Friesland, churches which returned to the outlook and practice of the Swiss Brethren, renouncing the magistracy as well as the sword. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Dutch Mennonites were numerous and influential. Mennonites are now to be found not only in Holland, but in Germany, Russia, the United States and Canada. They number in all some 400,000. In the United States they are recognised as one of the "historic peace churches". American Mennonite historians have been making important contributions of recent years to the study of the left wing of the Reformation. The General Mennonite Society of Holland is in membership with the World Council of Churches, and so is the German Mennonite Church.

(2) *The Brethren*. In 1719 a little company of Taufers, or Dunkers, descendants of sixteenth century Anabaptists, left Crefeld in Germany and established themselves in Germantown, Pennsylvania. They have grown in numbers and, like the American Mennonites, have sub-divided into a number of groups. Together they total more than 200,000 communicants. They also are a "peace church". Certain of them still practise foot washing as well as believers' baptism. The two main branches—the Church of the Brethren and the Evangelical United Brethren Church—are both in membership with the World Council of Churches and were represented at the Amsterdam Assembly. The Evangelical United Brethren Church is an episcopal one. From it there returned to Germany the founders of the Evangelische Gemeinschaft, one of the smaller continental Free Churches, now represented in Switzerland, Poland and Lithuania, as well as in Germany. Its organisation under superintendents and synods is very like that envisaged by the early Swiss Brethren. From the Evangelische Gemeinschaft there has split the Frei Evange-

lische Gemeinde, whose church order is what we should describe as Congregational.

(3) *The Hutterian Brethren*. Theirs is a romantic story. They are the direct descendants of the Anabaptist communities of Moravia, and owe their name to Jacob Hutter, one of the leaders in the development of community life. Faced with severe persecutions and dwindling numbers, they moved in the seventeenth century into Hungary and thence through Transylvania into Russia. In 1874 a number of tiny Hutterite colonies received permission to emigrate to America. They carried with them many carefully treasured records. Among them was a unique manuscript chronicle of the brotherhood, begun in 1573 and ending in 1665, and also a manuscript history, begun in Russia at the end of the eighteenth century but incorporating earlier material. With the consent of the leaders of the Hutterites now settled in Alberta and South Dakota, A. J. F. Zieglschmid, of North-Western University, has recently published complete and elaborately edited editions of both these manuscripts.<sup>14</sup> They provide rich and fascinating sources of first-hand material for the historian. But this does not complete the story. In the years immediately after the first World War, Eberhard Arnold, stirred by the Christian pacifism and Christian communism of the Hutterian Brethren, established in Germany a little Bruderhof on similar principles, and began the careful study of the older communities. Arnold died in 1935. By then the rise of National Socialism had made such ventures impossible in Germany. The community therefore migrated to Britain and secured land at Ashton Keynes, near Swindon. It was known as the Cotswold Bruderhof. Most of the members were refugees from the Continent, though a few from Britain joined them. In 1938, on their own press, they reprinted Peter Ridemann's *Rechenschaft*, from the exceedingly rare British Museum copy of the 1565 edition.<sup>15</sup> A second Bruderhof was formed at Oaksey. Then came the outbreak of the Second World War. To avoid internment a majority of the members set out across the Atlantic to Paraguay, where in the midst of virgin forest land two small communities living a common life have been established. The remnant who remained in England moved in 1942 to a farm at Wheathill, near Bridgnorth. The Wheathill Bruderhof now consists of a hundred and forty persons, including seventy-four children. In Paraguay the communities number four hundred and fifty; a number of recruits have recently gone out to South America from among the Displaced Persons of the continent.

There are more than 7,000 Hutterites in Canada and the United States.

(4) Fourth and last in this list of groups directly and consciously descended from the sixteenth century radicals, there are the *Schwenckfeldians*, a tiny community who emigrated from Silesia to the United States in 1734. Now settled in Pennsylvania, they treasure the memory of Caspar Schwenckfeld and study his writings.<sup>16</sup>

Mennonites, Brethren, Hutterites, Schwenckfeldians—these are the direct spiritual descendants of the left-wing of the Reformation. They are more than quaint survivals from a vanished age. There has been conscious archaism and conservatism in all these groups, but they have shown remarkable powers of resistance and resilience. Many of the Mennonites and Brethren in the United States are there sharing in the tremendous process of cross-fertilization of traditions and adaptation to a new physical and spiritual environment which is one of the outstanding characteristics of the New World. The direct link which both these communities will have with the World Council of Churches should be of mutual benefit.

## V

In estimating the results of the Anabaptist movement and its continuing influence in the modern world, however, one has to set beside these communities the Baptists and the Quakers. The former have made central in their witness the baptism of believers according to the New Testament mode and have closely followed Anabaptists in their doctrine of the Church and in their passion for religious freedom. The Quakers have held to the doctrines of the Inner Light and of non-resistance. The early history of the Baptists and the Quakers is curiously intertwined.<sup>17</sup> The spiritual roots of both bodies are to be found in the left-wing of the Reformation.

How early Anabaptism reached England, how widespread it was, how soon it passed outside the circles of the Dutch refugees—these are intricate and vexed questions. Lollardy probably continued as an underground movement far more extensively and strongly than Gairdner and Lane Poole were ready to admit. At the beginning of the sixteenth century there was what G. M. Trevelyan calls "a revival of Wycliffism".<sup>18</sup> This would probably make many as sympathetic to the ideas of the continental radicals as to those of the great Reformers. As

early as 1534, the name "Anabaptist" occurs in an English statute. It may be that at first few beside foreign exiles professed the dangerous doctrines associated with the word; but the nervousness of the authorities suggests otherwise. There were representatives from England at an Anabaptist synod held at Bockholt in 1536. By 1549 books against Anabaptists by Calvin and Bullinger had been translated into English. Several of the Anglican "Articles of Religion" are aimed directly at Anabaptist teaching: especially those on baptism, civil magistrates, Christian men's goods and a Christian man's oath. When, in the seventeenth year of her reign, Elizabeth felt compelled to relight the fires of Smithfield, the victims were Dutch Anabaptists. By then there were thousands of Dutch refugees in England, in flight from the fury of the Duke of Alva. There were certainly many Anabaptists among them. They were not in character if they refrained from propaganda, whatever the penalties attaching to it. One of the radical groups which emerged in Holland in the middle of the sixteenth century was the "Family of Love", a small perfectionist brotherhood. We know that at least once its leader, Henry Nicklaes, was in England. In the eighth and ninth decades of the century a number of English books against the Familists appeared, and in 1604 London Familists were bold enough to present their own petition to James I.

There is a persistent tradition that Robert Browne, the father of English Separatism, was influenced by Anabaptists in and around Norwich. In the years which link Elizabethan and Stuart England, there were a number of radical religious groups both in London and the provinces, besides those which have received the attention of Free Church historians. Ideas have wings as well as legs, and that generation had become adept at smuggling forbidden books and letters. But even if it could be proved—as some have tried to do—that none of the English religious refugees who sought asylum in Holland during the closing years of Elizabeth's reign had any prior knowledge of or contact with Anabaptism, then they certainly met it in one or more of its many forms when they reached Middelburg, Amsterdam and Leyden. The contacts of John Smyth with the Mennonites are well known.<sup>19</sup> But the early English Baptists provided only one of many bridges by which the ideas of the continental radicals passed over into Britain and the new lands across the Atlantic.

Many of the Commonwealth sects were but giving new and vigorous expression to the ideas put forward on the Continent

two or three generations earlier, ideas which had been watered with tears and blood. Behind the Quakers, for example, stand the English representatives of the Seekers and the Familists, groups whose spiritual ancestry carries us back to Schwenckfeld, Denck and Münzer.<sup>20</sup> Even the Fifth Monarchy men, the Levellers and the Diggers represented ideas which had their counterparts in the earlier movement. Dr. Nuttall has recently tried to exhibit a steady left-wards movement within Puritanism itself, a movement towards the radical Spiritualism which finally found expression in the teaching of George Fox. He admits that Schwenckfeld, Denck, Franck and Coornhert preceded Puritanism, but denies their direct influence upon it. But the Puritanism of the opening years of the seventeenth century did not develop in isolation. New ideas were being constantly infused into it. The parallels between the radical sects of the Commonwealth period and the Anabaptism of the preceding century are too many and various to be dismissed with the tag: "Post hoc, non propter hoc".<sup>21</sup>

Indeed, all the English Free Churches were indebted to the Anabaptists. Congregationalism cannot be understood simply in terms of Geneva or of the Act of Uniformity of 1662, though some recent apologists would have us so believe. The Arian and Socinian movements of the eighteenth century, which delivered all the churches from the grosser evils of credal subscription, drew inspiration from Anabaptist pioneers of earlier days. "Anabaptista indoctus Socinianus; Socinianus autem doctus Anabaptista" was a Calvinist gibe of the seventeenth century. But, as E. M. Wilbur has recently shown, the two movements had important connections of which neither need be ashamed.<sup>22</sup> Further, when one looks across the Atlantic, one sees that the whole development of the majority churches in the North American continent has based itself on the separation of Church and State and the voluntary principle in regard to Church membership. It was the Swiss Brethren who first put forward these views on the nature of churchmanship. In one of the discussions at the first Assembly of the World Council of Churches, it was pointed out that a large percentage, perhaps a quarter, of those in membership with the World Council, belong not to the Orthodox, the Anglican, the Lutheran or the Reformed traditions, but to another, one which runs directly back to the continental Anabaptists.

The ideas for which the Anabaptists gave their lives have not, however, remained the monopoly of specially organised

church groups. The doctrine of the Church as a fellowship of believers, emphasis on the spirit of man as the candle of the Lord, the claim for toleration and liberty of conscience, the recognition of the obligations resting on Christians to charity, community and evangelism—with differing degrees of emphasis, all these secured wide recognition in the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Others besides the direct descendants of the Anabaptists came to share their belief in lay evangelism, their distrust of a clerical hierarchy, their pacifism, even their communism. But clearly there is danger in taking any of these beliefs and practices in isolation and apart from their religious roots. A popular historian, writing of Commonwealth England, has recently committed himself to the extraordinary statement that “we may disregard the disagreeable religious enthusiasm which the times engendered and which their exigencies, perhaps, demanded.”<sup>23</sup> A study of the Anabaptist movement and its widespread influence leads one back to a group of enthusiasts, religious enthusiasts. † Do not the exigencies of our own day demand the recovery of something of their spirit? And are not their views still well adapted to the needs of the Gospel in many parts of the world because truly grounded in the New Testament and in the very nature of the Gospel itself?

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> *The New Statesman and Nation*, July 10th, 1948, in a review of W. Schenk, *The Concern for Social Justice in the Puritan Revolution*, 1948.

<sup>2</sup> *The Free Society*, 1948.

<sup>3</sup> *Theologisches Literatur Zeitung*, 1922, p. 401. Cf. Holl, *Gesammelte Aufsätze*, Vol. I, 1932, "Luther und die Schwärmer."

<sup>4</sup> The modern study of the Anabaptists may be said to have begun just a century ago with Carl Adolf Cornelius (1819-1903), a Roman Catholic scholar associated in his later years with the Old Catholics. Between 1850 and 1860 he issued a series of volumes based on the archives of the city of Münster. These set the events of 1533-35, when the Anabaptists were in control of the besieged city, in a very different light from that which had been customary. The work of Cornelius inspired Joseph von Beck (1815-87) to begin the scientific study of the Moravian and Hungarian Anabaptists. Beck's papers passed to Johann Loserth (1846-1936), the Roman Catholic Professor of Medieval History at Graz. He continued the study of the groups in Moravia and the Tyrol and brought to light the importance of leaders such as Balthasar Hübmaier and Pilgrim Marbeck, Loserth's contemporary, Ludwig Keller (1849-1915), archivist in Münster and Berlin, had in the meantime built further on the foundations laid by Cornelius. Keller directed attention to Hans Denck—described by one of his contemporaries as "the Apollo of Anabaptism"—and also tried to show the connection between the Anabaptists and earlier heretical, mystical sects of pre-Reformation times. It was Keller who was the inspirer of John Horsch (1867-1941), a young German Mennonite, who first in his native land and then in the United States gave himself with enthusiasm and ability to the study of the traditions of his community. The critical study of the Swiss Brethren, with whom the Mennonites had close and conscious affinities, had been begun by Emil Egli (1848-1908), of Zürich. Anabaptist hymnology secured the attention of Philip Wackernagel (1870) and R. Wolkan (1903). A critical edition of the hymns of the Hutterian Brethren is now being prepared by A. J. F. Zieglschmid, of North Western University, U.S.A. In the years immediately prior to the Second World War, a number of important collections of documents dealing with the prosecution of Anabaptists appeared in Germany, and also several valuable monographs, of which the following may be mentioned: E. H. Correll, *Das schweizerische Täufermennonitentum*, Tübingen, 1925, D. C. Neff (ed.), *Gedenschrift zum 400 jährigen Jubiläum der Mennoniten oder Taufgesinnten*, Ludwigshafen, 1925, W. Wiswedel, *Bilder und Führergestalten aus dem Täuferium*, Kassel, 1928, 1930, Fr. Hruby, *Die Wiedertäufer in Mähren*, Leipzig, 1935, Cornelius Krahn, *Menno Simons: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte und Theologie der Taufgesinnten*, Karlsruhe, 1936, R. H. Bainton, *David Joris, Weidertäufer und Kämpfer für Toleranz*, Leipzig, 1937, Fritz Heyer, *Der Kirchenbegriff der Schwärmer*, Leipzig, 1939. Books in English have been few and far between, but the following are useful: H. S. Burrage, *A History of the Anabaptists of Switzerland*, Philadelphia, 1882, Richard Heath, *Anabaptism from its rise in Zwickau to its fall in Münster*, London, 1895, A. H. Newman, *A History of Anti-Pedobaptism to 1609*, Philadelphia, 1897, Belfort Bax, *The Rise and Fall of the Anabaptists*, London and New York, 1903, H. C. Vedder, *Balthasar Hübmaier*, London and New York, 1905, R. J. Smithson, *The Anabaptists*, London, 1935. They have now to be supplemented by the more recent work of continental scholars and that of American Mennonite scholars such as J. C. Wenger, Henry C. Smith, H. S. Bender and others associated with the *Mennonite Quarterly*, Goshen, Indiana, 1927 onwards. *The Mennonitisches Lexikon*

began publication in Frankfurt a.M. in 1914 under the editorship of D. C. Neff and C. Hege. By 1942 it had reached the letter O. W. E. Crous and H. S. Bender have undertaken its completion.

<sup>5</sup> *Gesammelte Aufsätze*, I, p. 424n.

<sup>6</sup> *The Divine-Human Encounter*, 1944, p. 138.

<sup>7</sup> The tract is given in full in H. C. Vedder, *Balthasar Hübmaier*, 1905, pp. 84-88.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Edward Johnson, *Wonder Working Providence of Sion's Saviour*, 1654. Quoted in Miller and Johnson, *The Puritans*, New York, 1938, p. 160.

<sup>9</sup> Italics mine. Report of Commission IV. of the first Assembly of the World Council of Churches, Amsterdam, September, 1948.

<sup>10</sup> *Chronica*. Quoted by Rufus Jones, *Studies in Mystical Religion*, 1909, p. 49.

<sup>11</sup> W. T. Whitley, "Connexionalism," *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, IV, p. 26.

<sup>12</sup> Thirteenth edition, Lancaster, Pennsylvania, 1944.

<sup>13</sup> *A Study of History*, Vol. V, 1939, p. 171n.

<sup>14</sup> *Die älteste Chronik der Hutterischen Brüder*, New York, 1943; *Das Klein-Geschichtsbuch der Hutterischen Brüder*, Philadelphia, 1947.

<sup>15</sup> Ashton Keynes, 1938. Only three copies of the 1565 edition, beside that in the British Museum, are known, one in Brunn, one in Chicago, and one (incomplete) in a South Dakota Bruderhof.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. S. G. Schultz, *Caspar Schwenckfeld von Ossig*, Norristown, Pennsylvania, 1946.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. J. J. Goadby, *Baptists and Quakers in Northamptonshire*, Northampton, 1882, and R. E. E. Harkness, "Early Relations of Baptists and Quakers," *Church History* (New York), Vol. III, December 1933.

<sup>18</sup> *England in the Age of Wycliffe*, 1925 edition, pp. 347-9. Cf. G. F. Nuttall, *Transactions of the Congregational Historical Society*, XII, p. 249, and E. G. Rupp, *The Making of the English Protestant Tradition*, 1947, Ch. I.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. W. T. Whitley, *Minutes of the General Assembly of the General Baptists*, Vol. I, 1909, p. ix.: "The General Baptists are an English outgrowth of the Continental Anabaptists, acting upon the Lollards." In his later writings, e.g., *A History of the British Baptists*, 1923, pp. 17f., Whitley was at pains to deny the connection. Older Baptist historians such as Crosby, Rippon, Ivimey and Evans, recognised the links. The cumulative evidence in favour is overwhelming. Cf. also E. A. Payne, *The Baptist Movement in the Reformation and Onwards*, 1947.

<sup>20</sup> The problems which have perplexed students of early English Quakerism become much clearer when it is recognised that there were in England a number of groups which reproduced the views of the later Dutch Anabaptists. Cf. T. Sippell, *Zur Vorgeschichte der Quäkertums*, Giessen, 1920, G. F. Nuttall, *The Holy Spirit in Puritan Faith and Experience*, 1946, Appendices I, "The Grindletonian Movement," and II, "Messianic Language in Early Quakerism," and W. I. Hull, "The Mennonites and the Quakers in Holland" in *Children of Light* (ed. by H. H. Brinton), New York, 1938.

<sup>21</sup> *The Holy Spirit in Puritan Faith and Experience*, 1946, p. 15.

<sup>22</sup> *A History of Unitarianism*, Harvard, 1947. Cf. R. S. Friedmann, "The Encounters of Anabaptists and Mennonites with Anti-trinitarianism," *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, July 1948, pp. 139f.

<sup>23</sup> A. L. Rowse, *The Spirit of English History*, 1943, p. 71.



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